

Towards greater visibility and recruitment of skilled refugees

Leah Nichles and Sayre Nyce

Showcasing refugees' skills connects refugees to global work opportunities, and also shifts the narrative from one of refugees being burdens to host countries to one in which refugees are recognised as skilled workers for whom countries should be competing.

Refugees face multiple barriers to gaining access to employment. In addition to the frequent lack of access to the right to work in host countries and the lack of accessible, legal and safe economic migration pathways, there are added barriers of lack of visibility of refugees' skills and difficulty in verifying qualifications. Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) is conducting a pilot in Jordan and Lebanon to determine how labour mobility pathways to protection that address these obstacles might be opened up.

Employers need detailed information about work histories and skill sets in order to make informed recruitment decisions. The first step, therefore, to opening up international work opportunities to refugees is to map and demonstrate the depth and breadth of what refugees have to offer. TBB has created an accessible electronic platform – the Talent Catalog, the first of its kind – in which refugees in countries of asylum can document their qualifications, skills and experience to share with international employers who are seeking to fill skills gaps. In order to encourage refugees to register with and create a profile in the Talent Catalog, TBB conducted information sessions with refugees across Lebanon and Jordan to explain labour mobility pathways to protection. Since July 2016, more than 10,000 refugees in Jordan and Lebanon have registered and created profiles in the Talent Catalog. Those registered represent some 180 occupations; more than one third have a tertiary qualification; and more than one third speak a language other than Arabic.¹

Another element of the equation is to find employers willing to recruit skilled refugees to fill skills gaps. TBB identifies potential employers and makes

the economic and humanitarian case for hiring refugees. To date, five companies have offered jobs in Australia and Canada to 11 candidates currently in Lebanon and Jordan, while 60 other candidates are in various stages of recruitment processes with 20 other Australian and Canadian employers. Meanwhile, other employers in South America, Europe, the Caribbean and North Africa are either already exploring the Talent Catalog or have committed to do so when vacancies arise.

TBB works closely with both refugees and employers to clarify with employers the particular skills and qualifications they are looking for, identify qualified candidates from the Talent Catalog for hard-to-fill roles, and facilitate remote recruitment processes. As part of this, TBB assists refugees to showcase their skills and expertise by, for example, helping them prepare or update CVs, providing guidance on recording video introductions to employers, providing access to interview skills training and facilitating access to language classes in anticipation of formal language skills assessment. Employers may conduct their own tests – effectively an informal qualifications recognition process – to ensure that candidates meet their standards, although such processes may be insufficient to meet visa requirements for certain regulated professions. The opportunities TBB offers are also seen by refugees as being of longer-term benefit to them. One candidate in Lebanon said, "You will gain a lot of benefits even if you cannot get the job. Your confidence will increase, your skills will improve and you will be ready for any challenge in the world of work."

Draft 2 of the Global Compact on Refugees proposes the collection of population and

June 2018

www.fmreview.org/economies

socio-economic data – including on labour markets, investment and skills – which would, among other benefits, help foster inclusive economic growth for both host communities and refugees. The Talent Catalog is one example of capturing data on and demonstrating the range and depth of refugee skills – skills which could meet employers’ needs and contribute to economic growth anywhere in the world.

Engaging States

Governments have a critical role in creating economic opportunities for skilled refugees and in recognising qualifications but, to date, economic migration pathways have not been designed with the circumstances of refugees in mind. Those fleeing conflict zones may not have access to evidence of their qualifications or legal identification documents, and may not be able to provide traditional work histories, references and evidence of annual earnings. Recognising this, the Government of Canada is funding a pilot project in Kenya to identify barriers to refugees’ access to its skilled migration schemes. In both Canada and Australia, while working with increasing numbers of employers to recruit skilled refugees, TBB continues to consult with and

carry out advocacy work targeting both governments on how existing skilled visa systems may take account of skilled refugees’ unique circumstances. It is also in similar discussions with three other States.

Talent Beyond Boundaries is helping to advance an effective framework – one that may be replicated by others – for refugees to rebuild lives of self-reliance with protection and dignity, while contributing to the global economy.

Leah Nichles

lnichles@talentbeyondboundaries.org
International Advocacy Director

Sayre Nyce snyce@talentbeyondboundaries.org
Executive Director

Talent Beyond Boundaries

www.talentbeyondboundaries.org

1. See Talent Beyond Boundaries (Sept 2017) *Mapping Refugee Skills and Employability: Data and Analysis from the Talent Catalog*
<http://bit.ly/TBB-Sept2017>

“Attracting and retaining global talent is critical to Canada’s digital future. Refugees should absolutely be a part of that talent pipeline.”

(Sandra Saric, Vice President of Talent Innovation, Information and Communications Technology Council, Canada)